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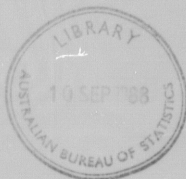


AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL

**Annual Report
1987-88**

**AUSTRALIAN
STATISTICS
ADVISORY
COUNCIL**

**Annual Report
1987-88**



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The Honourable Paul Keating, M.P.
Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia

I have pleasure in submitting the Report of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for the year ended 30 June 1988.

The Report outlines the work undertaken by the Council and is submitted to you for presentation to Parliament under section 24(2) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

N. Oakes

N. OAKES
Chairman
30 August 1988

MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCIL, 30 JUNE 1988

Date first
appointed

Mr N. Oakes, AO	Chairman	14.1.77
Mr I. Castles, AO, OBE	Australian Statistician (ex officio)	
Mrs Y.J. Bain	President, National Council of Women of Queensland	14.1.80
Mr G.D. Belchamber	Research Officer, Australian Council of Trade Unions	1.3.88
Prof. R.J. Blandy	Professor of Economics and Director, National Institute of Labour Studies Incorporated, Flinders University	17.3.83
Mr W. Boetcher	National Farmers Federation of Western Australia	14.1.80
Dr L.A. Brodribb, AM	Managing Director, M. Brodribb Pty Ltd	14.1.77
Mr D.W. Challen	Deputy Under Treasurer, Economic and Financial Policy, Treasury Department, Tasmania	18.2.87
Dr N.R. Conn	Under Treasurer, The Treasury, Northern Territory	2.2.87
Dr J.S. Deeble	Acting First Assistant Secretary, Health Benefits Division, Department of Community Services and Health	1.7.85
Dr M.A. Edwards	First Assistant Secretary, Social Policy Division, Department of Social Security	1.3.88
Dr. C.I. Higgins	Deputy Secretary (Economic), Department of the Treasury	1.3.85

Mr J.E. Hodges	Director, Government Statistician's Office, Queensland	1.9.86
Mr R.D. Holt	Acting Director, Economic Policy Division, Department of the Treasury, Western Australia	1.3.88
Mr P.D. Jonson	Deputy Managing Director and Head of Research, James Capel Australia Ltd	1.2.82
Mr J.D.S. Macleod	Group Economist, CRA Ltd	17.3.83
Dr R.C. Madden	First Assistant Secretary, Disability Programs Division, Department of Community Services and Health	1.3.85
Prof. G.M. Neutze	Head of the Urban Research Unit, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University	4.6.86
Mr G.W. Penn	Research Manager, Pennywise Smart Shopping Australia Pty Ltd	1.6.87
Mr V.A. Prosser	Executive Director, The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia	17.3.83
Mr A.M. Smith	Director, Economic Branch, The Treasury, South Australia	14.1.77
Dr A.W. Smith	Director, Resources and Development Division, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Victoria	17.3.86
Dr R.L. Tweedie	Dean, Information and Computing Sciences, Bond University	1.11.87
Mr A.J. Watt	Chief Executive, Treasury Corporation of New South Wales	10.3.86

Changes in membership since 30 June 1987

November 1987

Dr R.L. Tweedie appointed.

February 1988

Mr D.I. Stanton retired from the Council at the conclusion of his term of appointment, having served on the Council since 1981.

March 1988

Mr G.D. Belchamber appointed.

Dr M.A. Edwards appointed.

Mr R.D. Holt appointed to succeed Mrs K.G. Sanderson as the Western Australian Government representative.

Note:

In this Report, after the first reference, the Australian Statistics Advisory Council is referred to as ASAC or the Council, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics as the ABS or the Bureau.

Freedom of Information Act 1982

Under section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* Commonwealth agencies are required to publish a statement about their organisation, functions, decision-making powers, consultative arrangements, categories of documents maintained, and facilities and procedures to enable members of the public to obtain access to documents under the Act.

The relevant statement for ASAC appears as an appendix to this Report.

No requests for access to documents under the FOI Act were received by ASAC during the year.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

This is the twelfth Annual Report of the Council, and is made in accordance with section 24(2) of the Act which provides that: 'the Council shall, as soon as practicable after 30 June in each year, prepare and submit to the Minister, for presentation to the Parliament, a report relating to matters connected with the operation of this Act'.

Under section 18(1) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* the Council is to advise the Minister and the Australian Statistician on:

- (a) *the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;*
- (b) *annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and*
- (c) *any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.*

The Act enables the Minister or the Australian Statistician to seek the advice of the Council on these matters. The Council also offers advice on these matters to the Minister or the Australian Statistician when it considers it appropriate to do so.

The Act provides that the Council shall consist of a part-time Chairman, the Australian Statistician (ex officio), and between ten and twenty-two part-time members, including one nominee of each State Premier and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. The Chairman and members are appointed by the responsible Minister – currently the Treasurer – for periods of five years and up to three years respectively, and are eligible for reappointment.

The Chairman receives an annual fee, set by the Remuneration Tribunal, and members are reimbursed their travel costs, where applicable. Expenditure during 1987–88 totalled \$46,798.

Secretariat and administrative support for the Council's activities are provided by the ABS. The secretary of the Council is the Assistant Statistician, Co-ordination Branch, whose address is PO Box 10, Belconnen, ACT 2616 – telephone (062) 52 5256.

SUMMARY OF THE YEAR'S ACTIVITIES

The Council met on 8 July 1987, 18 and 19 November 1987 and 20 April 1988, when it considered a number of items of business in accordance with its objectives as set out above. This Report outlines the main aspects of Council's consideration of these items.

In the context of the Government's resolve to restrain public sector expenditure, Council's activities this year have included the examination of the efforts made by the ABS to achieve greater efficiencies in the use of resources while enhancing its statistical output. Council is impressed with the progress already achieved by the ABS in reshaping its work program to meet this objective, in particular with its proposals for a major restructuring of its economic statistics program. Council endorses the greater emphasis placed by the Bureau on the cost effectiveness of its various services and recognises the introduction of its new policy of imposing some charges for its statistical services and publications as a logical response to resource constraints. Council is aware that the ABS has had to operate under such constraints for a number of years and considers that its performance in maintaining a high quality statistical service in the face of these difficulties has been excellent.

ABS forward work program 1988-89 to 1990-91

Council devoted most of the time available at its November 1987 and April 1988 meetings to consideration of different aspects of the ABS forward work program for 1988-89 to 1990-91, as well as to reviewing work included in the program for 1987-88. Its task was complicated this year by a number of uncertainties regarding the future resource situation. In addition, new externally imposed ground rules affecting the preparation of the program meant that detailed documentation similar to that scrutinised by Council in previous years was not available when it examined the program this year. Council notes with satisfaction the ABS expectation that a return to the provision of such detailed documentation will be possible in the coming year.

In the context of the Government's resolve to control public sector expenditure, Council acknowledges the efforts made by the ABS to achieve greater efficiencies in the use of resources and believes that the level of resources associated with the work program is the minimum required for an acceptable statistical service. Council endorses the ABS work program and has written directly to the Minister indicating its support for the program.

1987-88 work program

The ABS reported that it would have sufficient resources, after allowing for efficiency dividends, to complete the projected program of work and that it had not been necessary to omit any important projects as a result of the 1987 budgetary process. A survey of major labour costs was included in this program and the need

to conduct it on an annual basis would be reassessed after results from the 1986-87 survey became available.

When advised that the ABS was addressing the issue of improving its indexes of manufacturing production, Council suggested that the ABS might have a role in influencing the compilation of the indexes being produced by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research and/or the use of the Institute's figures by the OECD. Since then the Institute has revised its monthly production index, with the result that the series is now much closer to the trend shown by the ABS quarterly index. In addition, the OECD has advised that the ABS's manufacturing production index will be used in future issues of OECD statistical publications.

1988-89 to 1990-91 work program

Council was advised that as a result of a number of proposed work program changes and reviews it would be possible to undertake the proposed work program for 1988-89 in its entirety and that the resource situation for the second and third years of the triennium looked reasonable with the expectation of further efficiencies being realised. In this context, it was reported to Council that investigations into the introduction of some specialisation and concentration of processing in the various offices of the ABS were underway and that, as a result of these, resource savings were likely. Council noted that the concentration of processing of large economic statistics collections in individual State offices had already been successfully undertaken by the ABS.

Council discussed the implications of the savings required by Government in the form of 'efficiency dividends' and the way in which they were being applied by the ABS. Council was informed that agencies had been advised not to assume that maintenance of approved programs necessarily meant maintenance of resource inputs.

Council's views on individual components of the work program are expressed elsewhere in this report, particularly in the sections concerning the proposed interviewer survey program and the review of economic statistics. The major elements of the program are as follows:

- . Development work related to the 1991 Census of Population and Housing.
- . A major effort to improve the accuracy of the ABS's register of businesses and organisations, particularly for large businesses.
- . Re-orientation of collection activity in the area of manufacturing industry statistics, in particular:

- the conduct of a full manufacturing census on a triennial basis, with censuses of only key data items in intervening years;
- the introduction of a program of 'ad hoc' surveys targeting areas of current importance to users; and
- improvement in the ABS's short term indicators, particularly the indexes of manufacturing production.

Conduct of an enhanced survey of motor vehicle use in respect of the twelve months to September 1988.

The introduction of smaller, more specific collections in the transport field to replace the Transport Industry Survey, reflecting a re-assessment of users' needs.

Conduct of the second services industries collection in respect of 1987-88, covering selected professional and business services.

Development of a construction industry survey in respect of 1989-90.

Conduct of an annual survey of major labour costs and a triennial wage costs survey (both subject to review in the light of results from the first surveys and users' needs).

A continuing program of monthly supplementary household surveys.

A program of special supplementary surveys as follows:

- 1988-89 Household Expenditure and Income
- 1989-90 Health
- 1990-91 Income (including assets and indebtedness)

A proposal for Flow of Funds statistics was accorded low priority by some members, while others maintained that overseas experience showed that the real value of these data was not really appreciated until users had the opportunity of actually assessing their usefulness. Council was advised that consultation with users on the Flow of Funds project would continue.

Proposed interviewer survey program

Council examined both the topics scheduled for incorporation into the program of monthly supplementary surveys, undertaken in conjunction with the labour force surveys, and the program of special supplementary surveys. Regarding the former, reservations were expressed about the frequency of some topics and about the

emphasis on labour related topics. It was suggested that many social topics were not suited to the Labour Force Survey collection strategy which relied heavily on interviewing 'any responsible adult' in selected households. Council notes that, following its advice, the ABS has reassessed the program and that some modifications have been made.

In regard to Special Supplementary Surveys, Council generally supports the proposal for the establishment of Health, Income and Household Expenditure (HES) as 'core' topics for which frequencies have been defined. Council also generally favours the collection of information on ageing and disability, recognising in particular the needs of the private sector for such data. Council strongly endorses the conduct of HES in the ABS's 1988-89 program of work. In view of the importance of the information that this survey provides, some concern was expressed that the sample size would not provide results of sufficient quality. However, Council notes the Bureau's assurance that the range and quality of output from a sample size of 7,500 would support important user needs in the area of taxation and welfare policies and the review of weights for the Consumer Price Index.

Council also notes that the question of the frequency of income surveys will be addressed when the ABS reviews the income/expenditure field of statistics this year. Council understands that there is some prospect of the ABS obtaining funds from client departments to enable it to conduct surveys in 1988-89 on how workers obtain their training, and on their career paths; topics which are regarded by Council as having a high priority.

Review of economic statistics

Council considered on two separate occasions during the year, reports on the progress achieved by the ABS in developing a new strategy for the production of a comprehensive range of economic statistics. From discussions held with major users, the ABS had concluded that for the economic statistics service to be effective it must provide annual data for macro economic analysis, micro data for industry analysis, small area data for regional analysis and sub-annual indicator data on goods and services produced. Deficiencies in the existing range of economic statistics meant that not all these requirements were being satisfied and it was clear that current statistical outputs needed to be changed.

The potential dangers arising from the decreasing relevance of producing a range of statistical output effectively locked into the past, which did not adequately meet the needs of users concerned with issues facing the contemporary Australian economy, had been raised in Council on a number of previous occasions. Council is pleased that the ABS has already addressed this problem by introducing new collections, such as the Services Industries Surveys, to obtain data on sectors of the economy not previously covered by ABS economic collections. However, Council is aware that much more work is needed to develop a coherent strategy to properly address this problem, and has been advised that the ABS intends to phase in over the next few

years a coordinated statistical 'package' comprising an annual economy-wide survey collecting income and outlay data from all enterprises of the largest enterprise groups (the number to be determined after detailed investigations to provide a profile of their structure for the business register); a quarterly indicator survey of the same enterprise groups together with periodic collections, including new collections of industry sectors not currently covered; and compilations of taxation data for smaller businesses.

The ABS has advised Council that the statistical infrastructure – the units, and the mechanisms for their delineation, maintenance and classification – needs to be modified to support this strategy. Significant decisions have already been taken to resolve major problems with the statistical units used and to improve the ABS business register. The statistical unit structures currently based on legal entity and location will be modified so that they align more closely with companies' operational structure and better reflect the 'real world' situation. Because operational structures are significantly more stable than legal structures, adoption of the new statistical units is expected to enhance the reliability of the information collected as well as reduce the resources required to produce it, both by respondents and the ABS.

In response to concern expressed at the implications adoption of the new units structure would have on regional and small area data, Council members have been assured that, while the new establishment unit could incorporate multiple locations, basic industry data on employment and type of activity undertaken would be collected for locations and would therefore continue to be available for small areas.

Council strongly supports the general directions being pursued by the ABS in developing its new strategy for economic statistics, welcoming in particular the major efforts being made to improve the Bureau's register of businesses and the prospect of better quality monthly and quarterly indicator information and more timely annual data from the restructured manufacturing statistics program. However, in endorsing the program, Council emphasises the importance of ongoing communication between the ABS and its major users during development of the total package and notes that the ABS has given an assurance that it will actively foster such contact.

Council acknowledges that adoption of the new strategy will result in some contraction in the range of information available for small areas but considers that this loss of data will generally be more than offset by the additional data produced and that most users will accept the proposal.

Council has expressed to the ABS some concern about the effects the rapid pace of change of the proposed new developments could have on statistical output, and has emphasised the need for a transition plan to ensure that major data sources are protected during implementation of the new measures proposed. Council notes that the ABS shares this concern and has taken steps to ensure that a transition program of this nature will be incorporated into the strategy.

Unmet demand

As in previous years, Council closely considered areas of unmet demand for statistics and offered advice on how it should be treated for a number of individual programs, despite the absence of indications of potential users' relative priorities.

Council suggests that when evaluating such demands in future more pursuit of the 'user pays' principle would be of value, both in assessing priorities and as an aid to the partial recovery of costs. However, in adopting this course, care should be taken to avoid basing priorities primarily on "willingness to pay" criteria and also on gathering statistics primarily for market research purposes. In addition, Council considers that there is a need to assess priorities *across* statistical areas, rather than solely within an area. Resources saved in any given area through increases in efficiency/productivity might be more appropriately deployed elsewhere in the organisation.

An important prerequisite to the consideration of new demands for statistics is the need for the ABS to keep constantly abreast of changing economic, financial and social conditions so that it can ensure that areas of high current interest are given appropriate recognition.

Pricing of ABS statistical services and publications.

Council has followed with keen interest the early stages of the implementation of the new ABS pricing policy, introduced in January 1988 in response to a Government requirement to reduce funding from appropriations. In order to maintain the level and quality of the statistical services provided by the ABS it had been necessary to compensate for this reduction in funding by increasing revenue to recover dissemination costs, mainly by charging for previously free publications and by increasing charges for its other products and services. Under the new policy the ABS is able to retain a portion of the newly generated revenue above its revenue target. Compared with the previous arrangements whereby most publications were issued free, the new arrangements provide the ABS with more useful information on the relative demand for various statistics.

Council generally supports the principle of the new pricing policy but considers that in providing the national statistical service, the ABS should ensure that the public good remains its paramount concern.

Council has given detailed consideration to the impact and implications of the new policy and notes that initial market reaction to it has been generally worse than the ABS had anticipated, with sales to Commonwealth government authorities falling and the Bureau's special data services suffering a particularly sharp drop in demand. However, some members consider that this situation will soon be redressed as the need for reliable statistics is recognised in budgets prepared by those authorities. It

is likely that the level of demand for particular services will change, something which could prove beneficial to the ABS if the user community signals its priorities in this way.

One of Council's major concerns (shared by the ABS) is that the policy should not be allowed to distort statistical priorities by concentrating resources in areas with most revenue potential at the expense of other important statistical series considered to be less profitable, although it recognises the need to closely examine those areas where very little revenue is being generated. Some members feel that the policy should be extended to include the imposition of charges for ABS outposted officers and consultancy services, pointing out that this may provide a viable mechanism for expanding such services.

Another issue raised in Council is the possibility of differential pricing for different subject matter topics and for different categories of users. Prices could be increased for the most popular publications in response to market demand while those non-profit organisations which could not afford to pay for publications could be exempted from payment or offered concessional rates. Council recognises the importance of ensuring that the arguments for exempting specified user categories payment are soundly based and notes the practical difficulties of effectively administering a differential pricing mechanism. It also doubts whether the ABS should be required to exercise the value judgements required to set up such a mechanism. Council supports the introduction of a daily news sheet and notes that its advice that the publication should be priced has been accepted by the ABS.

Council is particularly keen to monitor the evolution of the policy as new measures are developed by the ABS in response to the changing market environment and it has asked to be kept informed of future developments.

ABS Corporate Plan

Council has continued its involvement in the development of the first ABS Corporate Plan, giving it close consideration at its July 1987 and November 1987 meetings, during which members offered a number of suggestions, some of which were adopted by the Bureau. While there is scope for future editions of the Plan to be expanded to incorporate such matters as productivity, incentives and staff training, Council congratulates the ABS on the successful development of the first edition and strongly supports its objectives and strategies.

Completion of many of the action tasks resulting from the Plan, currently being actively pursued by the ABS, will not only help the Bureau to perform more effectively in a rapidly changing environment but will also assist Council to provide more effective advice on ABS proposals and priorities. Council recognises the dynamic nature of the Plan and has asked to be kept closely informed of its progress so that it can continue to contribute to its development as it is reviewed and refined.

Public Finance Statistics

Following concerns expressed by some State representatives, Council considered at its July meeting a paper dealing with public finance statistics and their accuracy, reliability and comparability.

For some considerable time the ABS had been forced to divert resources to the "bedding down" of its redesigned computer processing system for these statistics. Only recently had it been possible to concentrate more on improving the timeliness and quality of the data produced. The measures being taken would improve the accuracy of the statistics and reduce the size and incidence of revisions. Additional analyses and commentary in publications would assist users' understanding of the statistics, including the reasons for variations between States. In addition, it was proposed to publish statistics on the indebtedness of the public sector in Australia. Gross debt as well as net debt data would be compiled for all levels of government, with the first figures being published in respect of 1986-87.

Council questioned the comparatively large proportion of the resources of the public finance program involved in producing local government finance statistics and was advised that the resources and user needs of this part of the program would be reviewed. However, the ABS considered it unlikely that any major changes could be made without significantly affecting the requirements of State Grants Commissions, which were major users of the data.

Council strongly supports the work of the public finance program and the proposal to produce debt statistics, provided that an acceptable level of quality is achieved. It suggests that the ABS use its expertise to ensure that users better understand public finance data, through such means as more commentary, analysis and publication of information papers.

Energy Statistics

In its Annual Report for 1986-87 Council expressed the view that the ABS multi-sector energy survey (now called the survey of electricity and fuels) should be accorded a lower priority if reductions in the ABS work program for 1987-88 were required. Following this advice, the ABS had consulted further with Commonwealth and State bodies and they had reaffirmed their need for the survey. Since the ABS had not been required to make cuts in its program, it had decided to go ahead with the survey.

At its July 1987 meeting Council unanimously expressed strong scepticism about the justification for further energy surveys, particularly household surveys, on the grounds that the detailed data collected on the appliance holdings of households would provide a market research service, something which should not be the function of the ABS.

Council recognises that the main value of ABS energy surveys is the provision of data on the end use of energy consumption and on certain characteristics of household and industry users, but it believes that the needs of users of household energy statistics have been well satisfied in recent years. Council does not support any further energy surveys being conducted in the near future.

Labour Costs Surveys

At its November 1987 meeting Council considered a progress report on the development and conduct of labour costs surveys since November 1985, when it last discussed the topic.

The ABS reported that the first survey of major labour costs had been brought forward to collect 1985-86 data for the private sector and that its results had been published in April 1987. However, the timetable proposed at the November 1985 meeting of Council still stood in respect of an annual survey of major labour costs covering both the private and government sectors. The survey in respect of reference year 1986-87 would be conducted together with a separate (triennial) survey of wage costs directed at the same sample of employers. The latter survey sought information on the costs per hour paid for and the costs per hour worked. The results of the surveys would fill a significant gap in Australia's labour market statistics. They would represent a notable achievement by international standards and were expected to generate considerable interest.

Council supports the ABS in its efforts to obtain information both on the levels of different elements of labour costs and on their relative movements over time. Such information is keenly sought by industry which is constantly concerned at the continuing pressures for increases in the various components of employment costs. Ideally, some measure of total employment costs is required, and Council welcomes the Bureau's initiative in collecting for the first time information on fringe benefits taxes paid. It also recognises the importance of the Bureau's investigation into the feasibility of collecting data on the costs to employers of the fringe benefits provided, as well as other difficult areas such as welfare, training and recruitment.

Teenage Unemployment

Early in 1987 it became apparent that some users of ABS labour force statistics were misinterpreting the published unemployment rate for working age teenagers by inferring that it represented the percentage of all such teenagers unemployed, including those still attending educational institutions. At the request of the Minister, Council examined the problem at its July meeting when it considered a report prepared by the ABS on the adequacy of various measures of teenage unemployment.

The unemployment rate for teenagers published by the ABS is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed teenagers by the number of persons aged 15 to 19 years who are in the labour force. This treatment closely follows International

Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions and guidelines and is consistent with that adopted for other age groups and other labour force characteristics. Some users felt that these ratios were misleading and that unemployment to population ratios should be produced, while others wished to consider persons at school or at college as having equivalent status to those who were fully employed.

Council agrees with the ABS view that the use of such alternatives would lead to inconsistency of definitions and measurement of unemployment rates across different age groups, and strongly supports the continuation of the current ABS approach of issuing labour market series based on ILO principles.

Council notes that users wishing to examine alternative measures of teenage unemployment have been significantly assisted by the recent availability of additional ABS monthly data on labour force status by full-time attendance at tertiary institutions.

In October 1987 the ABS released an information paper on the measurement of teenage unemployment. Council considers that this paper, which explains the concepts underlying published teenage unemployment rates, will help eliminate the general confusion about their nature and appropriateness which was apparent before its release.

1991 Population Census

Council has kept closely in touch with the development work being undertaken by the ABS for the 1991 Population Census, considering the topic at its November 1987 meeting, and copies of the widely publicised information paper 'Preliminary ABS Views on Content and Procedures' were sent to members early in 1988.

The Government's decision that the ABS should consult with users on the content of the 1991 Population Census on the basis that its cost should be a good deal less than that for 1986 is acknowledged by Council. Council's firm view is that the wider implications of cost-cutting options should be considered in depth before they are adopted. Although the decision to cancel preliminary processing of the 1986 Census had saved the ABS about \$1 million, some adverse effects resulted from extending the period of reliance on 1981 Census based population estimates for revenue distribution between the States and for planning.

The ABS has been asked to provide an indication of the cost of specific questions when Council considers in detail various options on the content and procedures for the Census at its July 1988 meeting. Council recognises that difficult decisions will have to be made at this meeting.

Study papers by Council members

The practice, successfully introduced last year, of individual Council members presenting study papers on the use of statistics by their organisations continued this year and four papers were discussed. The authors were Mrs Y.J. Bain, Professor R.J. Blandy, Dr R.C. Madden and Mr D.I. Stanton (who retired from Council in February 1988).

Mrs Bain's paper described the work undertaken by National Councils of Women and the wide range of statistics they required. She stressed the importance of reliable statistics to produce a sound basis for the preparation of submissions by these organisations, usually on social welfare, education and community health issues. She emphasised her strong support for the ABS policy on confidentiality, saying that it was widely appreciated by the many people in all walks of life whom she encountered during the course of her work. Council endorses this support and recommends that full account should be taken of the policy during discussions with Australian Archives on the retention of population census forms.

Professor Blandy's paper discussed the use of ABS statistics by the National Institute of Labour Statistics (NILS), the main function of which was to convert statistical data (mainly labour force and social data collected by the ABS) into analyses which could be readily used by its clients. He considered the ABS to be well-placed to carry out client-driven collections, with its unique reservoir of specialist data collection talent and facilities, and advocated that major users should pay for ABS services. Council considers that the feasibility of the ABS conducting client financed surveys should be closely examined.

Dr Madden's paper on community services data requirements emphasised the importance he attached to the establishment by the ABS of a user group on health and welfare statistics. He strongly supported the greater involvement by the ABS in production of 'theme' publications which presented data, derived from a variety of sources, on issues of contemporary concern.

Mr Stanton's paper stressed the need for comprehensive and timely data generated from the ABS household survey program, in order to assess the effectiveness of the social security system and to provide a basis for accurate costings of alternative expenditure strategies. He commended the ABS on recent improvements in producing the type of data required by the Department of Social Security and supported the continuation of analytical studies of social data, similar to the recently issued fiscal incidence study. However, he felt there was a need for a regular cycle of key surveys, for an expansion of ABS household survey capacity and for more extensive release of unidentifiable unit record tapes. Council is interested in the potential for greater access by users to unidentified unit records which would permit more productive user analysis of data, and reduce pressure on the ABS for additional data and analysis. It intends to consider the matter in some detail at a later meeting.

Council members expressed their appreciation for all the study papers, saying that they provided a valuable insight into areas of interest on which most members had limited knowledge. Similar papers by other members will be considered by Council in the coming year.

General

In considering a brief report on public reaction to the reweighting of the consumer price index series, a topic which Council had considered last year, Council noted that most press reports had concentrated on the implications of the new series for wage determination purposes.

The Council wishes to record its appreciation for the assistance received from the Statistician and his officers in the presentation and comprehensiveness of information provided on the matters considered by Council and the courtesy and efficiency with which secretarial and other services have been made available. In particular, it wishes to thank Mr Fred Bagley, the recently retired First Assistant Statistician of the Economic Censuses and Surveys Division of the ABS, for the practical down-to-earth advice he has given Council since its inception.

APPENDIX

Freedom of Information Statement

Below is a statement, as required by section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act* 1982, about the structure of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) and how members of the public can obtain access to information held by the Council.

Establishment, organisation and functions

See Introduction to this report (page 1)

Powers

As an advisory body, ASAC has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public. It does not administer any enactments or schemes.

Arrangements for outside participation

ASAC members are appointed by the Minister responsible for the ABS so that a broad range of views and interests is reflected in the advice that ASAC offers to the Minister and the Statistician. Membership details are given on pages iv-vi.

Persons or bodies outside the Commonwealth administration may participate in the Council's policy formulation by making representations to the Minister or the Chairman on matters of concern to them.

Categories of documents

No documents are held by ASAC which are open to public access on payment of a fee or customarily available free of charge. The annual report, which is tabled in Parliament, is available from all ABS offices. Files are maintained which contain documents relating to the administration of the Council, papers discussed at Council meetings and correspondence relating to the activities of the Council.

FOI procedures and initial contact points

All inquiries concerning access to documents, including inquiries under the Freedom of Information Act 1982, may be directed on weekdays, between 8.30 am and 4.30 pm, to the Secretary, Australian Statistics Advisory Council c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cameron Offices, Belconnen, ACT 2617 - telephone (062) 525256.

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